

CAPITOL ^{update}

Senator Eddie Lucio, Jr.

Eighty-First Legislative Session, 2009

COMMITTEES:

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS & TRADE, CHAIR
BUSINESS & COMMERCE
FINANCE
GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATION
STATE AFFAIRS



EDDIE LUCIO, JR.
STATE SENATOR
DISTRICT 27

CAPITOL ADDRESS
P.O. Box 12068
CAPITOL BLDG. 3E.18
AUSTIN, TX 78711
(512) 463-0127
(512) 463-0061 FAX

Dear Friends,

You gave me the responsibility of representing your interests in the Texas State Legislature. I invite you to read this newsletter to learn more about what my colleagues and I accomplished on your behalf during the 140 days of the 81st Legislative Session.

I believe that the **smartest investment** our state can make **is in Texans like you** – in your health, your education, your job. That's why this session I am especially proud of passing legislation that sets **the Rio Grande Valley as the next location for a University of Texas medical school**.

Creating a medical school in the Rio Grande Valley will help ease our shortage of medical professionals and will improve the health of our communities by educating more doctors who are familiar with the unique needs of the border. A medical school will also be an important economic engine for the Valley. Studies show a medical school can generate \$1.3 billion in business revenue and boost residents' income by nearly \$500 million over a ten-year period. The Rio Grande Valley needs and deserves this kind of investment, and the medical school bill I passed opens this gateway.

As you'll learn from this newsletter, the legislature passed a number of **bills that will make a positive difference** in your lives as well — legislation to expand the margins tax cut to more small businesses, funding to get children on buses to and from school more safely, and measures to provide more care for veterans and Texans with special needs.

I am proud that my legislative package of 105 bills included legislation to direct more support toward adult basic education along the border and to self-help programs that assist those living in substandard housing to build their own homes.

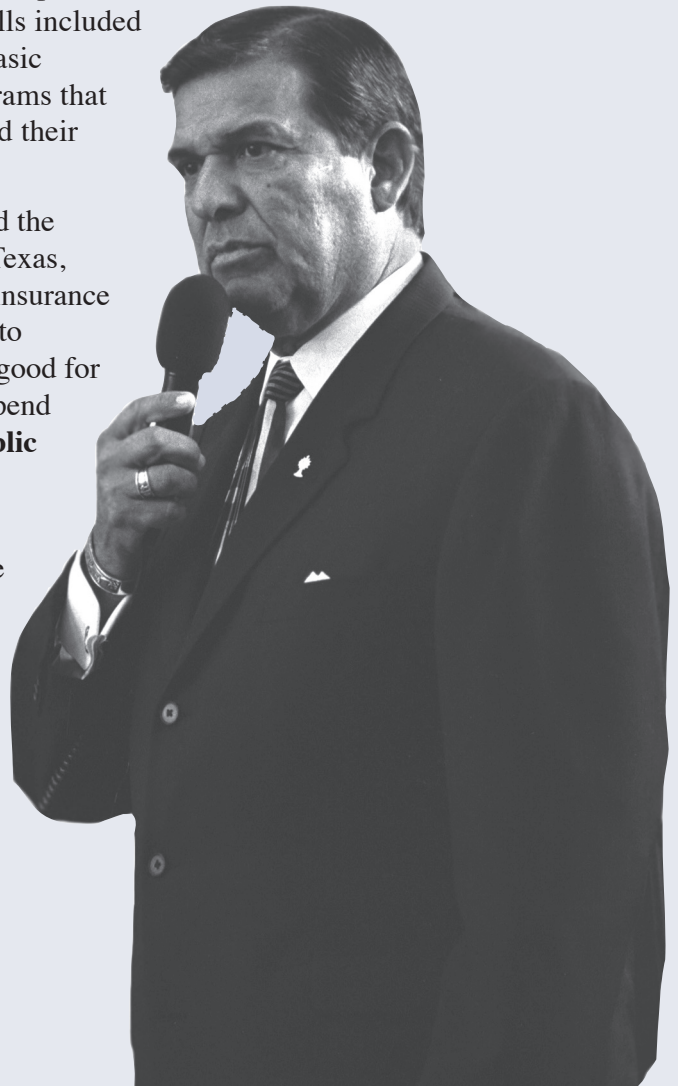
Regrettably, this year the legislature also missed the opportunity to address critical challenges facing Texas, including the protection of homeowners through insurance reform and the improvement of children's access to healthcare. The state has the capacity to do more good for everyday Texans — but the legislature needs to spend **less time on politics** and **more time on good public policy** to make that a reality.

Your phone calls, letters and visits to my office help me serve you better. Please continue to share with me your thoughts on issues that matter to you. I also encourage you to make your voices heard by voting, especially on November 3, when 11 proposed amendments to the Texas Constitution will be on the ballot.

Thank you for your support. It's an honor to work on your behalf.

Sinceramente,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Eddie Lucio, Jr.".
Eddie Lucio, Jr.



Establishing a Medical School



Celebrating the passage of SB 98, Sen. Lucio is joined by, from left to right: Lt. Gov. Dewhurst, and co-authors from the South Texas Delegation: Rep. Rios-Ybarra; Rep. Flores; Sen. Hinojosa; Rep. Oliveira; Rep. Guillen; Rep. Peña, and Rep. Lucio III. Absent from the photo are: Sen. Zaffirini; Rep. Gonzales, and Rep. Martinez.

The Rio Grande Valley will be the site for the next medical school in Texas. Senate Bill 98, authored by Senator Lucio, establishes the University of Texas Health Science Center - South Texas. The school will dramatically improve medical, educational and economic opportunities in the area by expanding upon the investment that has already been made in the Regional Academic Health Center. The Valley suffers from a chronic shortage of medical providers, with less than half the national average of direct care physicians. A medical school in the region will not only allow residents to remain in the area to receive their education, but will also bring new students and medical experts to the Valley.

**“THE RIO GRANDE VALLEY
HAS ONE OF THE MOST SEVERE SHORTAGES
OF MEDICAL PROVIDERS IN THE NATION.**

**NOW
WITH SENATE BILL 98 WE
HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY
TO CHANGE THIS SADDENING
TREND.”**

A medical school will also create a huge economic boost for the region. The University of Texas Health Science Center - South Texas will provide new opportunities in medical research and in bio-technology, which are major economic drivers. In 2005, the Association of American Medical Colleges reported that their member medical schools and affiliated teaching hospitals generated \$462 million in related economic benefits.

Once operational, a medical school will raise health care standards, improve the quality of higher education and provide an economic value for residents throughout South Texas.

Providing Health Care

Physician Loan Repayment

Through the use of revenue from the sale of smokeless tobacco, the legislature approved a new initiative to help repay student loans for doctors that commit to working in primary care in rural or medically underserved parts of the state. Although many medical students are interested in pursuing primary care, the high cost of student loans requires many of them to pursue more lucrative specialty practices. The initiative is expected to provide loan repayment for up to 225 doctors per year. Because medically underserved counties exist throughout the state, Texans everywhere can expect to benefit from this program.



During a ceremony honoring fallen peace officers, Senator Lucio thanked the families for their loved ones' courage and sacrifice. His bill, Senate Bill 872, ensures survivors of law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty remain eligible for health insurance policies at affordable rates.

Prevention

This year Senator Lucio continued his efforts to reduce obesity rates and improve preventative health. He expanded on the success of earlier legislation that increased the coordination of state wellness initiatives by requiring the agencies involved to create a public health outreach plan. Following the success of a previous initiative he passed to encourage wellness for state employees, he also pursued legislation to further promote policies that will save the state money through the reduction of associated medical costs.

Provider Shortage

Texas is experiencing a chronic shortage of health care providers, especially along the border. Cameron and Hidalgo counties have less than half the national average of registered nurses per capita. A bill Senator Lucio sponsored will temporarily reduce the required score on the Test of English as a Foreign Language exam for qualified licensed nurses from Mexico, allowing them to practice in border counties for up to one year.



In recognition of his achievements for the families of peace officers, Senator Lucio received the “Visionary Leader” Award from the Combined Law Enforcement Association of Texas.

Putting Children & Families First

School Bus Safety Belt Funding

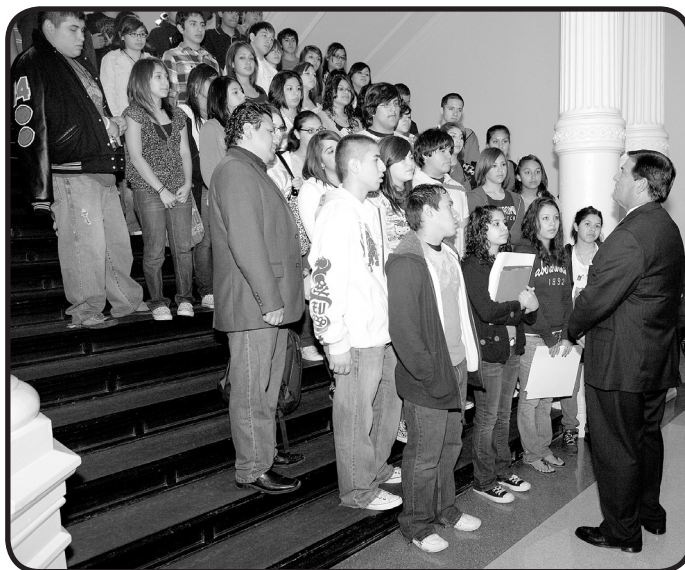
School buses have become safer but are still susceptible to life-threatening rollovers and side impact collisions. Last session, Senator Lucio authored, championed and passed Ashley and Alicia's Law, to protect the lives of students through the installation of three-point safety belts on Texas school buses. This session, Senator Lucio fought successfully to secure \$10 million in funding to install safety belts on all new school buses. Beginning next year, it is estimated this funding will provide new safety belt technology to help protect the lives of up to 70,000 Texas school children.

Improving Services for Children with Special Needs

Senator Lucio created a statewide Task Force for Children with Special Needs to unite leaders from state agencies, legislators and key stakeholders to create a plan to enhance the coordination of services for children and young people with disabilities. The objective of the Task Force is to improve educational, medical and long-term care services for young people with serious mental illness, developmental disabilities and chronic illnesses.

Insurance Coverage for Autism

Autism rates in children are extremely high, but when addressed close to the time of diagnosis, early intervention usually leads to significantly improved outcomes for the child. Unfortunately, this treatment is extremely costly and too difficult for most families to afford. Two years ago Senator Lucio passed landmark legislation to require health insurance companies to cover early intervention for autistic children between the ages of three and five. Since the



Senator Lucio speaks to a group of students from Edcouch-Elsa High School on how the legislative process works and impacts them.

success of this legislation has dramatically improved the lives of hundreds of children, Senator Lucio worked to expand the law to require treatment from the time of diagnosis until a child turns ten. Senator Lucio's early intervention legislation is not only improving the quality of life for children, it is also expected to save billions through the reduction of the need for lifetime services. In fact, other states are now turning to Texas as a model for the coverage of early intervention.

Pre-Kindergarten, New Science Labs & Instructional Facilities

As a member of the Senate Finance Committee, Senator Lucio was instrumental in securing \$25 million for the expansion of Pre-Kindergarten programs. The 14 percent spending increase will allow the program to serve an estimated 17,000 additional lower income four-and-five-year olds. Additionally, the legislature invested \$20 million for new science labs and \$75 million for instructional facilities.

Addressing the Health & Nutrition of Very Young Children

Childhood obesity and diabetes have become a significant problem in Texas and in response, the legislature has made several changes to improve nutritional and physical activity standards in schools. However, more children are entering school overweight and studies show that three quarters of those that start kindergarten above a healthy weight will be overweight as adults. To address the unique and important health needs of our youngest Texans, Senator Lucio created the Early Childhood Health and Nutrition Interagency Council, a seven agency collaboration charged with finding ways to improve the nutritional intake and health of pre-school age kids.

Funding Public & Higher Education

Public School Finance

The legislature appropriated \$1.9 billion for public school finance. This amount provides a minimum increase of \$120 per student (the weighted average daily attendance), which will allow districts to increase teacher salaries and make improvements to facilities. Senator Lucio also supported a \$20 million appropriation for Teach for America, which will double the number of the program's teachers available to serve the Rio Grande Valley.

Teacher Pay

Teachers, school counselors and speech pathologists will receive an \$800 pay raise from a funding increase approved by the legislature. Senator Lucio also passed legislation to provide retired teachers with additional time to enroll in the state health insurance program.

TEXAS Grants

This program provides a full year of college tuition and fees for lower income students who traditionally do not qualify for academic scholarships. TEXAS Grant recipients are 46 percent more likely to obtain their degree. Thanks to Senator Lucio's leadership, the Rio Grande Valley is the number one recipient of funds from this program, which has provided more than \$67 million in funding to students in the region. A proposed bill during the legislative session would have changed eligibility requirements, disqualifying almost half of currently eligible students; however, Senator Lucio and others were able to block the legislation from passage.



Retired teachers from the Rio Grande Valley receive a warm greeting during their advocacy day at the Capitol.

Expanding Economic Development

Margins Tax Break

The legislature passed a measure to reduce taxes for small businesses by raising the taxable total revenue exemption from \$300,000 to \$1 million. Small businesses are the backbone of the Texas economy, and this \$172 million tax cut will bring much needed relief to an additional 40,000 small businesses in Texas.

Port of Brownsville Permanent Overweight Corridor

Over 6,000 local jobs and millions in trade tonnage depend on cargo moving through the Port of Brownsville's corridor, made possible by the Port's overweight/oversize vehicle permit program. Beginning in 1997 with legislation authored by Senator Lucio, this program is periodically reauthorized by the Texas Legislature. Each reauthorization jeopardized the future of the program. This session Senator Lucio passed Senate Bill 1373 to permanently extend the Port of Brownsville's overweight/oversize vehicle permit program, thus bringing greater economic security to these jobs and trade relationships.



A delegation of city officials from Cameron County meet with Senator Lucio during the legislative session to seek his help on deannexation. The Senator helped bring consensus among city officials from Brownsville and surrounding areas so that every community's interests will be fairly represented.

Chairing International Relations & Trade

Colonia Self-Help Program

In 2001, the legislature established a colonia self-help program to allow non-profit organizations to work with border residents to address water and wastewater needs. This session the legislature passed Senate Bill 1371 by Senator Lucio to improve the program's local impact by expanding the number of participating non-profit organizations.

Economically Distressed Areas

Senator Lucio sponsored legislation to raise the overall standard of living in disadvantaged communities by ensuring that residents have safe access to water and wastewater services. House Bill 2374 achieves this goal by allowing the Texas Water Development Board to finance the cost of connecting private residences to main water lines.

Texas Bootstrap Loan Program

The Texas Bootstrap Loan Program is a successful self-help program that makes it possible for colonia residents along the Texas-Mexico border to build their own homes with the assistance of volunteer labor. Senator Lucio passed Senate Bill 679 to continue the Bootstrap Program for an additional ten years. The bill also expanded the program to enable family, friends and organizations like Habitat for Humanity to help those with documented disabilities and other limiting circumstances participate in Bootstrap. With Senator Lucio's bill, the Bootstrap Program will also provide assistance to homeowners with houses in critical need of rehabilitation.



For his efforts on behalf of rural Texans, Senator Lucio received the "Outstanding Service Recognition" Award from the Office of Rural Community Affairs.

Reforming TWIA & Developing Hurricane Recovery

Texas Windstorm Insurance Association (TWIA)

TWIA is important to all who live on the coast and it was declared an emergency legislative issue by the Governor this session. Senator Lucio worked hard in the Senate to challenge legislation aimed at increasing insurance rates by 50-108 percent for coastal policy holders. Because of the efforts of Senator Lucio and other coastal legislators, residents who are insured by TWIA will not face any new, automatic surcharges from the passage of House Bill 4409.

Senator Lucio is now monitoring the insurance department's interpretation of the TWIA legislation to make sure that policy holders have an affordable option for wind insurance.

Housing Response

Hurricanes Rita, Dolly and Ike demonstrated that Texas lacks rapid, efficient, and effective programs to provide temporary and permanent housing for Texans affected by natural disasters. To ensure that the state proactively addresses this need, Senator Lucio passed a bill to require the creation of an advisory committee on natural disaster housing reconstruction. This committee will develop model housing reconstruction plans and pilot programs for the three areas most recently impacted by natural disasters, which includes the Lower Rio Grande Valley.



"Paul has been the most loyal employee and friend. His enormous contributions to state government and to the people of District 27 will never be forgotten," said Sen. Lucio.

Retiring Chief of Staff Paul Cowen gets a warm "abrazo" from Senator Lucio who honored him in the Senate Chamber on the last day of the session with a gavel and a Senate Resolution for his untiring dedication to the Senator's office, his constituents and the Texas Legislature for 20 years.

Enacting Laws to Help & Honor Veterans

100% Property Tax Exemption for Disabled Veterans

This landmark legislation was greatly supported by Senator Lucio giving veterans a total tax exemption on their homes if they are 100 percent disabled from a service-connected disability or have a lower disability rating, but with the classification of individual unemployability.

Establishing a Veterans Hospital in Rio Grande Valley

Rio Grande Valley veterans need and deserve a Veterans Hospital to avoid a five-hour, 300-mile trip to San Antonio. Under a new bill, the Texas Veterans Commission and the Department of State Health Services will work with the United States Department of Veterans Affairs and other appropriate federal agencies to establish a Veterans Hospital in the Rio Grande Valley.



Rio Grande Valley veterans give Senator Lucio and Rep. Aaron Peña a thumbs-up for their support of a Veterans Hospital in the Rio Grande Valley and other legislation to help South Texas veterans and their families.

Mental Health for Veterans

Suicides for veterans ages 20 to 24 are twice the rate as that of the civilian population of the same age range. A new measure directs the Department of State Health Services to create a military veterans peer-to-peer mental health program by 2010 to provide counseling to military veterans who suffer from mental illnesses.

Texas State Cemetery Flagpole and Monument for Fallen Texans

This session Senator Lucio passed a bill requiring that a flagpole and monument be erected at the Texas State Cemetery in Austin to honor service members from Texas who are killed while serving in a combat zone. Under the bill, when a member of the United States Armed Forces from Texas dies in a combat zone, a Texas flag will be flown at half-staff. The monument and flagpole will be placed in the State Cemetery's military monument area to honor our fallen heroes.



The Texas Legislature honors 126 fallen heroes from Texas who have died since last session in the global war against terrorism. Senator Lucio helped with the reading of the names as the families listened, and he presented a Texas flag.



Please remember to vote November 3 on 11 proposed Constitutional Amendments.

**Honor the Texas Flag:
I pledge allegiance to thee, Texas,
one state under God, one and indivisible.**

ORDERING A TEXAS FLAG

Contact Senator Lucio's Capitol office (512) 463-0127 to order a Texas flag and request to have it flown over the State Capitol.

3x5 Nylon	\$15.25	3x5 Cotton	\$22.25
4x6 Nylon	\$22.00	4x6 Cotton	\$29.55

¡BIENVENIDOS! VISIT US!

As Texans we should all be proud of our State Capitol, which averages 1.5 million visitors a year. Senator Lucio encourages all of you to visit this National Historic Landmark and take advantage of the many educational services it provides. Tours are available through the Capitol Information and Guide Services, as well as the Capitol Visitors Center located in the historic General Land Office Building.

While in Austin, what better way to learn about Texas than with a fun and educational trip to the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum. Experience a place dedicated to the history and the spirit of the Lone Star State. Enjoy 41,000 square feet of the interactive exhibits, special-effects Texas Spirit Theater and Austin's only IMAX Theater as you immerse yourself in "The Story Of Texas."

School groups and families are urged to contact Capitol Information and Guides at (512) 463-0063 or Senator Lucio's office at (512) 463-0127 to obtain more information about scheduling personal tours at the State Capitol. To visit the Capitol Visitors Center call (512) 305-8400.

Helpful Information:

Legislature Online
www.capitol.state.tx.us

Senate Web Site for Kids
www.senate.state.tx.us/kids

Voting and Election
Information
1-800-252-8683 (VOTE)
www.sos.state.tx.us

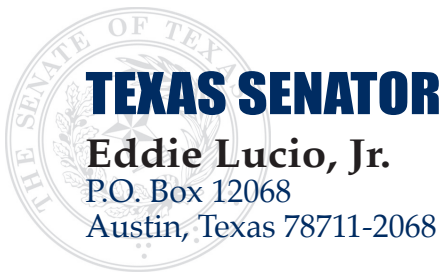
Attorney General
1-800-252-8011
www.oag.state.tx.us

Texas Department of Aging
& Disability Services
1-800-458-9858
www.dads.state.tx.us

Potential Federal Tax Credits
www.irs.gov/recovery



Senator Lucio welcomes Roland, Kim and Michael Euresti from Brownsville during their family visit to the Capitol.



Eddie Lucio, Jr.
P.O. Box 12068
Austin, Texas 78711-2068

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AUSTIN, TEXAS

Senator Eddie Lucio, Jr.

BROWNSVILLE **WESLACO**
7 North Park Plaza 500 South Kansas
Brownsville, Texas 78521 Weslaco, Texas 78596
(956) 548-0227 (956) 968-9927
(956) 548-0440 Fax (956) 447-0583 Fax

AUSTIN
P.O. Box 12068
Capitol Station
Austin, Texas 78711
(512) 463-0127
(512) 463-0061 Fax

You can e-mail Senator Lucio at his Senate
web page: <http://www.senate.state.tx.us/>



Senator Lucio and family welcome the newest addition to their family, Olivia Rose (pictured lower right) born to Representative Eddie Lucio, III and wife Jaime.

Map of Senate District 27



Civic leaders from McAllen are honored in the Senate Chamber by Senator Lucio, Lieutenant Governor David Dewhurst and Senator Juan "Chuy" Hinojosa.



Senator Lucio honors the Brownsville Zonta Club, which includes Mrs. Minnie Lucio, with a Senate Resolution congratulating them on their 50th anniversary.



On Mid Valley Day at the Capitol, a large crowd offers support and shares concerns with Senator Lucio.



City and business leaders discuss their legislative agenda and top priorities with Senator Lucio on Kingsville Day at the Capitol.